



18 December 2015: Calais Declaration

We must refuse the encampment of foreign citizens and the closure of borders

On its ten-year anniversary, the Migreurop network met in Calais last weekend to lend its support to the third-country nationals who are trapped in difficult terrains in the Calais region and exchange views with the activists and organisations who are involved in the struggles against policies of hounding of migrants by the French and British states as well as the European Union (EU).

These three days of debates with militants who came from all over Europe, Turkey and Africa flowed towards a shared understanding: the fortification of the port of Calais and of the Eurotunnel site, together with constant police harassment force the people who want to reach Great Britain to do so in conditions of “illegality” which are increasingly perilous. This is one of several aspects of a policy implemented at all Europe’s borders to obstruct the movement of third-country nationals. It is often accompanied by miserable living conditions and the creation of ghettos for the purpose of criminalising them (through abusive bans and controls) and to break off their contact with local populations and people acting in solidarity with them. These camps and other slum-like locations are the result of European policies which are further strengthened the more apparent their failure becomes: the utopia of borders which are only open to the people who benefit from globalisation contributes to the institutionalization of the mistreatment of exiles, not to putting an end to their flight...

Hence, the surveillance and control mechanisms (the barriers in Ceuta and Melilla or at the entry point to Macedonia, walls at the Greek-Turkish and Serb-Hungarian borders, Frontex agency patrols and the Sophia operation in the Mediterranean...) are meant to keep migrants far away from Europe. They intervene to complement the policies of non-issuance of visas and cooperation with so-called countries of origin – including those which are most dictatorial – which are called upon to obstruct departures. The fundamental rights of millions of people, particularly the right to claim asylum, are flouted in this way. The absence of legal ways to enter European territories condemns them to experience persecution by the police, exploitation of their misery by smugglers, and survival in conditions of extreme instability. Such conditions can only worsen the traumas connected to the many wars and violences, which these exiles are trying to flee.

In the Calais region, the double legal barrier of the Le Touquet treaty (which sets the conditions for subcontracting the control of the British border to France) and of the Dublin III agreements (which force asylum seekers to lodge their application in the first EU country they pass through) makes it impossible for Sudanese, Syrians, Iraqis, Eritreans, Afghans, etc... to request asylum in the United Kingdom. Thus, only 30,000 people (out of the 630,000 people asylum demands recorded in the EU) have done so in 2014, a lower figure than in previous years, a decline that this is expected to continue in 2015, at the same time as arrivals in the European Union have experienced an increase which has been described as «historic».

The situation which Calais has experienced for nearly 20 years (the Sangatte camp “closed” in 2002 had opened in 1999) is symptomatic of the policies which the European Union has been advocating with blind persistence: hence, the planned “hotspots” and “processing centres” will unfailingly translate, if they are effectively implemented, into the creation of immense detention centres in Italy and in Greece, but also in Niger and Turkey. «Encampment», as far away as possible from the glances of civil societies, is the final objective of the European Union’s migration policies: by relentlessly sorting migrants, it thus goes so far as to violate the most basic human rights and to cause the death of numerous third-country nationals.

The Migreurop network deems it important to solemnly reaffirm that respect for rights and human dignity requires the cessation of all forms of detention and ghettoisation of the people exercising their right to leave their countries. Necessary steps towards dignified reception conditions, in the Calais region and beyond, include repealing the Dublin Regulation and any form of border controls (like those promoted by the Le Touquet treaty) introduced for the purpose of transforming them into enclosures, rather than legal and protected points of passage.